

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT™

CIVIL WAR

Steve's Life and Times as a Comic Artist!
Unpublished Ultimate Secret Art!

Plus, Steve McNiven vs. Mark Millar:
Whose Side Are You On?

STEVE MCNIVEN

MARVEL

MARK MILLAR

Mark Millar on Ultimate Fantastic Four, Remaking
the Avengers Ultimate Style and Civil War!

Plus Civil War Commentary with Joe Quesada and
Editor Tom Brevoort!

RATED T+



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DIRECT EDITION

PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Welcome to this month's Marvel Spotlight: Civil War special issue, where we gather together ace creators Mark Millar and Steve McNiven and ask the question: WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?!?! Place your bets, bunky, because this is going to be a no-holds barred deathmatch between two of Marvel's elite creative talents! We promise blood, gore and carnage on an epic scale as Mark and Steve square off in bloody battle against each other. One of them WILL NOT SURVIVE! It's the comic event of the-

Ummm... dude? Your editor here. This "no-holds barred deathmatch" between Mark and Steve isn't what we had in mind for the Civil War issue of Marvel Spotlight.

Well, yeah, but come on! This'll really get some attention! Pump up the excitement and all!

We like attention and excitement. Attention and excitement: good! But we don't like "creator deathmatches." And certainly not with talent we have locked up in exclusive contracts!

But Mark is totally up for this! He thinks he can take McNiven! He's been training for this, practicing his drop kicks, his leg sweeps, and this move he calls the Slingshot Powerbomb! And I had McNiven on the phone, man, you should have heard him practicing his wrestle roar: "IT'S CIVIL WAR, BABY! IT'S CIVIL WAR!!!!!" I got chills. These guys are primed for battle!

Listen, let's stick to the normal kind of coverage Spotlight provides. Tell readers they can expect an extensive interview with MARK MILLAR about his tenure as one of the driving forces of the Ultimate Universe, with a special focus on Ultimate FF and The Ultimates. You can also tip prospective readers that we've got a behind-the-scenes look at his Marvel Knights Spider-Man and his career-defining run on Wolverine: Enemy of the State.

Yeah, that's all good, but...Slingshot Powerbomb, dude! On McNiven's head of all places!!!

(I'm ignoring you.) After you talk about Millar, you can tell readers about your interview with STEVE MCNIVEN, covering his early years as an artist in many different mediums like painting and stone carving, his journey from CrossGen Comics to Marvel, and the instant popularity of his art that came from his work on Marvel Knights 4 and New Avengers!

Still not as good as a Marvel Creator Deathmatch! Whose side are YOU on, anyway?

I'm on the side of a great Civil War Spotlight Special is what side I'm on! Speaking of which, our exclusive coverage includes a look at Millar and McNiven's creative process in putting together Civil War, a look inside Steve's sketchbook, and more goodies that will whet any fan's appetite on the dawn of this ultra-significant storyline in Marvel history.

(Grumble grumble...) Okay...I'll tell everyone. McNiven. Millar. Civil War and bunches more. Yadda yadda yadda...but no Creator Deathmatch. You're no fun!

Tell them about how this book is 32 pages and no ads while you're at it.

You tell them! I have to break it to Mark Millar that all that time spent training on the Slingshot Powerbomb is wasted! In fact, you better look out next time he's visiting the Marvel offices, buddy! It'll be CIVIL WAR, BABY!!!!

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ALPHA FLIGHT'S LAST STAND: Seriously. After this, they're flattened by an alien menace and they don't get back up again! (from *New Avengers* #16.)

They had a gallery school which I worked in as well, which is how I got interested in teaching art to kids. We had kids come in to do painting and printmaking, to do sculpture.

SPOTLIGHT: You found out you were good with kids at that point?

STEVE: Teaching has always run in my family, and I was always really interested in the profession. So I went back to school after traveling around Europe and doing all that sort of stuff in my mid-20s. I went back to school when I was 26 and got an education degree so I could teach fine arts from the ground up, from kindergarten to the last year of high school. Picked that up, then got married to the girl I shacked up with. Then we decided to head into America, thought it would be kind of cool to move to Seattle.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you know anybody or have any sort of jobs waiting for you when you moved to America?

STEVE: Nope. We didn't have anything. We just had money that we got from our wedding. We got rid of all our stuff, all we had was in our backpacks. We took off for the West Coast, we basically stayed in the Y for a while. We managed to get some jobs, but I never managed to get a job teaching even though I was certified.

I was still buying comics when I had the money. When I left Seattle, I had a pretty sizable collection of comics. I had enough that they would fit inside a pretty big garbage bag. That's what I did when I was leaving, I put all the comics inside a garbage bag and trundled it down to the local comic shop and set it inside the door as I was leaving. (Laughs.)

SPOTLIGHT: So you didn't treat your comics all that well, huh?

STEVE: I'm not a collector, I'm a reader. I don't bag stuff up. The comics that I do have are just lying around. I don't put them in order or anything. Every now and then I'll pull something out and read it.

SPOTLIGHT: What kind of comics were you into then?

STEVE: Oh, Marvel and DC, the occasional Image book. Dark Horse stuff, being over there in sort of Dark Horse territory in the North West,

just a bunch of different things. Whatever caught my eye. I usually follow certain people like Frank Miller, Mike Mignola, they had some great stuff coming out then. I like a variety of different things.

SPOTLIGHT: But even at this time, as a comics fan and visual artist, you had no inclination to merge the two and become a comic book artist?

STEVE: No, not really. I had always had an interest in comics, but teaching was always the thing that I was more focused on. You gotta realize, I didn't draw. A lot of people think that if you go into visual arts, you're automatically the best draftsman ever, or you have a strong desire to be a draftsman, but there's more to art than pencil and paper. There's 3D stuff, sculpture, things like that. All my drawing skills were pretty rudimentary. I was more about how to get a good concept down that I would then put into some form 3D-wise. But still, I loved comic storytelling and everything about it, I just wasn't very good with the pencils.

My wife and I got out of Seattle because we were kind of down and out. My wife got offered work back in Toronto. We hadn't been there for eight years, but it was still a fun place. Didn't really know anyone by then, there weren't a whole lot of people left that we knew. I had bumped into some guys that had the top floor of a comic store set aside as a sort of co-op comic art studio. There were a bunch of people hanging out who liked comics, likeminded people that were fun to hang out with and make friends with. I joined up, figured I could teach myself how to draw, and I started out... but I was just terrible.

I kept doing it, though, and I actually managed to land myself a high school teaching job, but it was only part-time in the morning. It was great to pay the bills, but in the afternoon I started teaching adult art classes. As I started getting on with figuring drawing out for myself, I figured I might as well parlay it into some extra work. Even after I left the co-op studio, I kept drawing, kept interest in the medium and kept at it. There was so much to learn.

SPOTLIGHT: Who were some of your compatriots at the time that you were working with from the co-op?

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

MARK MILLAR • Official Handbook



REAL NAME: Mark Millar

DATE OF BIRTH: December 29, 1969

OCCUPATION: Comic book writer

PLACE OF RESIDENCE: Scotland

WEBSITE: www.millarworld.tv

FIRST COMICS APPEARANCE: *Saviour #1*, Trident 1989

FIRST MARVEL COMICS APPEARANCE: *Skrull Kill Krew*, 1995

HISTORY: Perhaps no other writer apart from Brian Michael Bendis has meant more to Marvel Comics as it enters the 21st century than Mark Millar. Unlike many of his iconoclastic peers who also hail from the United Kingdom, Mark actually grew up immersed in the world of superhero comics, so he has never been shy about wanting to write superhero stories. His creator-owned and indie comics work is rife with provocative subject matter and explorations of contemporary social concerns, and he is not above sharing that edge with readers in more mainstream comics.

After proving himself throughout the nineties as a talent to watch while writing for DC Comics and the UK imprint 2000AD (as well as an early foray with Marvel on the *Skrull Kill Krew* limited series), the promise of Mark's talents came to full fruition on the crowd-pleasing yet controversial title *The Authority*. After a dispute with DC over editorial decisions concerning that book, he left them and turned to Marvel, who immediately found a role for him with the *Ultimate Universe*.

His arrival came at a time when *Ultimate Spider-Man* had just bowed and was an unexpected success, crashing the sales charts and setting a heightened standard for success for anyone who would later make an attempt at "Ultimization." It was in this environment that Mark made his first major contribution to Marvel with *Ultimate X-Men*. Much like *Ultimate Spider-Man*, the *X-Men* were to be dialed back to the essence that made them great to begin with; Mark was to cut through the crusty trappings of years of continuity to get at the core of the characters for a new generation of readers. This was a high-risk project, and if Mark had fouled it up, it could have jeopardized both the *Ultimate* brand and his new career at Marvel. By now, everyone knows that Mark did not foul it up: His companion title to *Ultimate Spider-Man* was every bit the creative success, as Mark integrated forty years worth of *X-Men* history, characters and lore into a solid two-year run.

The yield from that triumphal creative risk paid off, and Mark's star had never been higher! Next up for him was *The Ultimates*, a new rendering of Earth's Mightiest Heroes, featuring Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, Giant-Man, the Wasp and Hulk. He'd already done it with *X-Men*, and Marvel knew it could count on Mark to pull together another large ensemble of characters from the regular Marvel Universe. This time, however, the challenge was even greater: gather these disparate heroes together in a way that made sense to more sophisticated readers, bring them up to date without altering what made them quality characters to begin with, and continue building on the success of the *Ultimate* line. He and artist Bryan Hitch pulled all that off in spades. *The Ultimates* and its sequel title, *Ultimates 2*, were ensconced at the top level of the sales charts every month, and what's more, they were critical successes as well. The creative team was hailed for updating the *Avengers* of old in a progressively modern way, and the wide-screen action brought to bear by Millar and Hitch was emulated almost note-for-note in *Ultimate Avengers – The Movie*, a cartoon movie released to DVD in early 2006.

Meanwhile, Mark was invited to enter the regular Marvel Universe to have a stab at two of its most iconic characters: *Spider-Man* and *Wolverine*. Paired off with industry heavyweights to draw his stories—Terry Dodson on *Marvel Knights Spider-Man* and John Romita, Jr. on *Wolverine*—Mark brought the same fast-paced and cleverly constructed plots with which his *Ultimate* fans were already familiar. *Wolverine* in particular was an unbelievable adrenaline rush of action against a backdrop that touched on all corners of the Marvel Universe before its thirteen-issue run concluded.

While achieving such great heights writing comics for Marvel, Mark has been busy building his own website and web community at *Millarworld*, an online site that houses extensive discussion forums where Mark is very active. He is also building a small library of *Millarworld* indie comic books, including the titles *Chosen* and *Wanted*. His next project for Marvel is *Civil War*, a seven-issue mini-series that culminates a storyline in slow build across *Avengers Disassembled*, *House of M* and *Decimation*. It will be the biggest comics project of the year, and none other than Mark Millar is charged with making it happen.

THE MARK MILLAR MARVEL COMICS LIBRARY:

Civil War #1-7 (2006)

Marvel Comics: X-Men #1 (2000)

Marvel Knights Spider-Man #1-12 (2004-2005)

Marvel Spotlight: Mark Millar/Steve McNiven (2006)

Skrull Kill Krew #1-5 (1995)

Trouble #1-5 (2003)

Ultimate Fantastic Four #1-6, 21-up (2004-2006)

Ultimate Fantastic Four Annual #1 (2005)

Ultimate War #1-4 (2003)

Ultimate X-Men #1-12, 15-33 (2001-2003)

Ultimates #1-13 (2002-2004)

Ultimates 2 #1-up (2005-2006)

Ultimates 2 Annual #1 (2005)

Wha Huh? #1 (2005)

Wolverine #20-32 (2005)



BROTHER VS. BROTHER: Marvel's super-heroes are compatriots who have faced death before, but always united. Now they face the trial of their lives, divided, in Mark Millar and Steve McNiven's

THE SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH MARK MILLAR

Mark Millar writes giant-sized stories with a sweeping reach that are tailor made for Marvel's super heroes, imbuing his characters with the kinds of range and robust personality that is grand enough to fit within the widescreen aspect of his stories. Pick up his *Wolverine: Enemy of the State* storyline, or *The Ultimates*; start reading and you'll feel what happens when his writing talents are matched with the stunning high-drama of artists like John Romita, Jr. and Bryan Hitch. It's a visceral, adrenalized reading experience that can keep you squirming in your seat, eagerly turning those pages. *Marvel Spotlight* was fortunate to have Mark share some time from his busy schedule writing not only Marvel's *Civil War*, but finishing up duties associated with *Ultimate Fantastic Four* and *The Ultimates*. That's a lot of work for one guy, but he does it all with a gleeful abandon, the same kind of attitude you'll catch reading this interview.

SPOTLIGHT: Other British writers, like Warren Ellis and Garth Ennis, were not raised on classic Marvel heroes and as a result do not hold them in very high esteem. You on the other hand seem to be a total Marvel geek. How did this come to be?

MARK: I've often wondered about this and can only put it down to the fact that I'm the youngest of six kids. I've got four big brothers, two of whom were really into comics, and so when all the other guys my age were getting into 2000AD and the very fashionable British comics of the day, I was reading hand-me-down issues of *Amazing Spider-Man*. Also, I didn't have any money and so kind of had to read whatever my brothers were buying. They were hugely into Marvel in the 60s and when I came along in the 70s they weren't about to change their reading habits to suit this wee curly-haired guy. And so I had to just adapt and survive, really, getting into whatever books they were bringing home. Back then, the Marvel UK reprint line was very healthy and I grew up reading black and white, wide-screen format versions of the American books you guys read a few years before. I got a lot of my school-friends into this stuff too and it really was quite a perfect environment, an entire class full of boys who knew *Giant-Man's* secret identity and other semi-obscure stuff. I remember we used to all play at super heroes every playtime for about two years, all arguing over who got to be the good ones. There was a really quiet boy in the class, Gerard Molloy, who always played *The Watcher*. He used to stand on a little hill and watch the rest of us wrestling. Seriously. Pretty much every time.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you ever read the *Beano* comics in Scotland? Are there any particular Scottish comics or characters that you ever liked?

MARK: Yeah, I quite liked the *Beano*, the *Dandy*, the *Beazer* and all these comics most Americans won't have heard of. These books were mostly one page stories and usually humorous, although some adventure stories had slightly longer "book-length" four pagers. I liked *Billy's Boots*, a story about a young footballer who could only score goals when he wore a pair of old football boots haunted by a man who died in 1920. I also really liked *Wizzer and Chips*, the star of that book being a school-boy with an eighteen-foot python who used to sit beside him in class (without anyone else batting an eye-lid). But the cream of the crop was *Dor Wullie and The Braons*. These were the only actual comic strips exclusively done in Scotland and the collections used to sell a million copies here every Christmas. Not bad when you consider that we're a tiny country of six million people. It was roughly one for every household.

SPOTLIGHT: What was your childhood like in regards to comics? What were some touchstone moments that you can look back to that you realize now were moments that put you on track to where you are today?

MARK: Scotland is probably the poorest country in Western Europe and I grew up in one of the poorest areas in one of the poorest regions. It only seems rough or violent in hindsight because it certainly didn't feel that way at the time and I really had a pretty charmed upbringing, considering I was into all this really geeky stuff like comics and stickers and playing



CIVIL WAR HAS BEGUN: Captain America busts his way through a cadre of Maria Hill's elite SHIELD soldiers in *Civil War* #1.



THE ULTIMATES: Meanwhile, over in the Ultimate Universe, Iron Man, Thor and Cap are getting along just fine! (Cover to *The Ultimates* #12.)

cards and so on. I was lucky in that all the other kids I knew got into it too, certainly at primary school, and because I could draw I'd always get asked to do pin-ups of Shang-Chi fighting Dr Doom or something. It was planet of the geeks, I suppose, except every one of these guys knew how to hot-wire a car. As far as a defining moment, probably the time I realized I was not as other men was when I was caught wearing a plastic Spider-Man costume underneath my school uniform. It was one of those bad, ill-advised licensed costumes Marvel used to do back in the old days where the chest was yellow, the legs were red and it said Spider-Man in big letters across the front. But a costume was a costume and, aged eight, I sneaked it under my uniform for maximum thrills and was shamed as I almost passed out in class, the teacher opening my shirt to reveal my secret ID to all in a bid to get me air. My old school-pal Tommy Lally, whom I still see every Friday night for a pint, loves telling people this story. How in God's name did I ever meet any girls?

SPOTLIGHT: You have the reputation now of being what many consider a shameless self-promoter. How do you feel about that tag? Well-earned or a bad rap?

MARK: Well-earned, I hope. After all, Stan was a shameless self-promoter and there is no greater man on this Earth than Stan Lee.

SPOTLIGHT: What are some of your "greatest hits" when it comes to promoting yourself and your work? Obviously, the Superman bet is a memorable occasion, no?

MARK: A good magician never reveals his tricks, as they say.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you meet your wife? What's her take on the whole comics business and your part in it?

MARK: I started dating Gill when I was at University, shortly before I dropped out and tried to make a go of it as a writer. She, rather naughtily, was still at school, but obviously mature enough to realize I was an idiot and had the good sense not to get hooked in this four-colour crack cocaine. It chills me when I think back how every other girl I dated was forced to read *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* and my reprints of the *Kree-Skrull War* Avengers issues, etc, etc. But Gill was very direct and rightly pointed out this was the reason none of my previous relationships had lasted more than two months. I kind of like the fact she doesn't read comics because it means I get to chill out when I'm released from my attic office and get to come downstairs. As far as she's concerned, "Lee, Kirby and Ditko" is an office of Jewish lawyers. It keeps me grounded and, because she doesn't read my books or any of the online stuff, it's almost like a secret identity. She reads my cheques, though. She's a huge fan of the cheques.

THE ULTIMATES

SPOTLIGHT: More than any other Ultimate book that had been published at that point, *The Ultimates* had a lot of fun dialing back longtime Marvel Universe characters to zero and then building them back up again in fresh new ways. Is there anything - if at all - that gives you pause when you're charged with doing the deconstructing of these characters?

MARK: I don't think too much procrastination is a good idea when you're working in a pop medium. Comic writers tend to work very quickly and unlike movies or even novels, the actual story can appear just a couple of months after it first popped into your head. The closest comparison is probably 1930s pulp writers in that you had to rely on your instincts and just hope for the best. *The Ultimates* was just one of the books where everything clicked. The characters were great, the creative team gelled and I got to do a project that had been bubbling away in some form since I was thirteen years old and reading Alan Moore's first super hero comics. The notion of how super heroes would be in the real world had always tickled me and this was just my turn to have a bash at the concept. Also, I can't stress enough how much Bryan Hitch makes this work. Without Hitch's artwork, this series really would have been nothing. He's the best in the business and having him illustrate your story is like having Spielberg direct your screenplay. Thank God he's hideously ugly or I'd really be incredibly jealous of all that talent inside a single portly figure.

SPOTLIGHT: Back when Marvel Comics was being born, it was a novel conceit that our heroes were flawed, that their foibles would be as much an interesting source of story material as their superpowers. In the end, though, the characters were always motivated by a sense of heroism. Certainly, *Ultimates* amps up the character foibles and flaws to a degree far beyond their original incarnations. Do you have any thoughts about how society has evolved since those perhaps more innocent days, and also how our sense of what is considered heroic may have changed as well?

MARK: I don't think so. The flaws have certainly changed because they reflect the modern world, but heroism is a very simple concept that has changed very little since the dawn of man. The very concept of heroism is doing something to help other people even if it puts your own life in danger. That works as well in *The Ultimates* as it did in Greek myths. The foibles are interesting though and, yes, I suppose we pushed these to the limit in *Ultimates*, but I don't think we compromised the characters in doing so. Tony was always a drinker, Hank had a history of domestic violence, Banner was always consumed by self-loathing. We just applied modern story-telling techniques, but they're essentially the same characters.



ULTIMATE NICK FURY: Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch model the head honcho of SHIELD after actor Samuel L. Jackson. No word on if Nick Fury's favorite food is a Royale with cheese! (From Ultimates #9).

SPOTLIGHT: Nick Fury's look appears to resemble the actor Samuel L. Jackson. Assuming this is intentional, why the reference to him in particular?

MARK: Well, he's the king of cool, isn't he? This goes back to our idea of stripping these guys right back to basics and just finding what made them work. I love Nick Fury like no other. He's one of my favourite Marvel characters, but the Steranko cool that he imbued on the character was rat-pack cool and very much of the period. Obviously, that's still cool in a classic, retro sense, but it means little to a modern kid. Also, Nick Fury just sounded like one of those great, 70s blaxploitation names. He sounded like an African-American disco super hero or something and we wanted to play around with that too.

Little known fact, but did you know Sam is a huge Avengers fan? We didn't know this when we picked him, but it's a nice piece of serendipity that he's now leading The Avengers, essentially. He's bought a lot of the original pages from Hitchy.

SPOTLIGHT: One character that didn't change much at all was Captain America. The Steve Rogers in Ultimates is very similar in tone to the original Steve Rogers. Was that always the case in his character development? Or

was his take something we'd settled on after working through and abandoning some other concepts?

MARK: The big misconception with the Ultimate line is that we're trying to do "What If" kinds of stories or alternate takes, but it's precisely the opposite. Particularly when we started, the general consensus was that the characters in the established Marvel U had just moved too far from their core personalities. We had to remind people why they liked these guys in the first place. That meant putting Spidey back in high school and giving him girl problems as far as Brian's book went and, for me, Captain America had to become a man out of time again, a straight-shooter in a more complex world. All we did was stay true to the characters.

SPOTLIGHT: Your Ultimate Hulk is just off the charts. As subtle a characterization as Captain America is, your Hulk is so full of kinetic, frenetic energy that it really does seem to want to jump off the page. You have styled him as a cannibal! He eats people, *far cryin'* out loud! Did you have to fight for these types of, shall we say, interesting character nuances? Did anyone at Marvel say, "Ummm....maybe we shouldn't have the Hulk eating his teammates?"

MARK: I think they would have stepped in if it didn't make sense but, again, going back to the Robert Louis Stevenson roots of the Hulk, we felt it was important for Banner's monstrous id to be his polar opposite. As the Hulk, he was able to do everything he secretly yearned to do whether it was getting Betty back, beating up people who put him down or, as a vegetarian, scoff down as much live meat as he could get his big, dirty hands on.

SPOTLIGHT: Betty Ross is totally unlike her initial characterization. In the early years of Lee/Kirby, she was drawn as a timid, meek gal who wandered around her daddy's military base, fainting, crying and sighing. Your Betty Ross....well...she ain't that kind of gal! Her relationship with Bruce is very twisted. On balance, do you think she's a good person, bad person or do you even care what people think of her?

MARK: The original characterization of Betty didn't make much sense to me at all. She's not the kind of person who would be drawn to a weak guy like Bruce. In my experience, men and women with Bruce's personality tend to attract bullies and people who make all their decisions for them. It's a form of self-loathing where they think this is all they deserve, but it also completes the couple in the sense that these two extreme personalities essentially make a whole person. This is why I made Betty friends with Jan because she's very much a female version of Bruce. She doesn't like herself very much and is also in an abusive relationship (with Hank Pym). In terms of friends, it makes sense to me that she'd also seek out someone like Betty when she was at college so she can feel small.

The ability to become small is an odd super-power. The Marvel women



OPEN WIDE! Mark's Ultimate Hulk practices his barbaric form of dentistry on Hank Pym! (From Ultimates #5).

CAST OF CHARACTERS: THE ULTIMATES

Though a retooling of the original Marvel Universe Avengers, much of the essential elements of the characters stayed in place: names, powers, and basic personality traits were all pretty much the same across the board when comparing the Ultimates to the Avengers. One obvious—and major—difference, though, was the fact that Bryan Hitch was redesigning the visual look of some of the characters. In *Ultimates #4*, Mark Millar has a little fun with this when he dialogues a free-spirited discussion among the characters about which famous personalities might play them in a movie. Here, Mark discusses the references to well-known personalities, and perhaps some not so-well-known personalities, that he and Bryan Hitch used when stylizing the cast of characters of *The Ultimates*.

1. CAPTAIN AMERICA: Hitch and I agreed from the start that Cap would be based on Brad Pitt. Thirty years ago, it would have been Redford and I know this surprises everyone, but you have to believe that Cap is the world's greatest military strategist and he has to be so inspiring he can make people risk their lives as they go into battle. The face and especially the eyes are the most important thing with Cap. He needs to look intelligent. That's his most important feature.

2. IRON MAN: God, this HAD to be Johnny Depp. Again, we didn't even think twice about it. Iron Man is Howard Hughes meets Mick Jagger and only Depp could pull off a character this drunken, disgraceful, shameless, horny and likable all at the same time. Tony Stark is Marvel's greatest eccentric and Johnny Depp (think about him in *Ed Wood*) was the voice I heard when I wrote him and the face Hitch usually drew.

3. THOR: At the risk of sounding crass, I just imagined Thor as Jesus. There was no specific actor we had in mind.

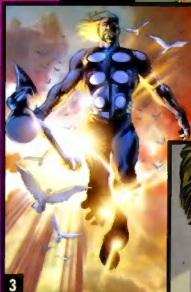
4. GIANT MAN: Matthew McConaghay. Definitely. Very charming, very good-looking, but also slightly creepy. Plus you'd love to see Cap bitch-slap him. Be honest. You would.

5. THE WASP: I think we often talked about Zhi Zhi Zhang (from *House of Flying Daggers*) because she's both very tough and also very fragile at the same time. Wasp needs to be beautiful, but have a sting in her tail. She's a really complex personality; a super hero whose power is to make herself SMALLER. She seems to have the same kind of self-loathing as Banner in many ways and is drawn to brilliant, but abusive relationships (whether it's the coarse Betty Ross as her friend or Pym as her husband).

6. SCARLET WITCH and QUICKSILVER: Angelina Jolie and (whatever her brother is called). Nuff said.

7. HAWKEYE: Bruce Willis. It was always Bruce Willis, whether I was writing the words or Bryan was drawing the pictures. They should do a Hawkeye movie with Willis. He's a fantastic character.

8. BANNER: Steve Buscemi. Creepy, likable and has eyes that look like he could either be the most dangerous or the weakest person you will ever meet in your life. I wish he'd played Hulk in the movie. He's perfect.





CAPTAINS AMERICA AND BRITAIN: *Ultimates 2* saw the first appearance of Mark's Ultimate version of Captain Britain! (Cover to *Ultimates 2* #4.)

definitely seem to have some issues, the other prominent chick at the company being a girl who can make herself fade away into invisibility. But I digress... No, I don't think Betty's a bad person. She's just not someone I'd choose to hang around with.

SPOTLIGHT: *Ultimates* Vol. 1 closed down with its thirteenth issue, but you and Bryan Hitch got revved back up again with *Ultimates 2* ten months later. You've really pulled out the stops in this volume, with significant characters being killed, turning traitor, and generally playing havoc with the status quo; it's also your last run on *Ultimates*. Is there a sense of freedom in knowing that this is your swansong on the title?

MARK: Well, Bryan and I both agreed that we wouldn't do *Ultimates 2* until we could top the original so we just wanted to throw everything at the wall here. But you're right, there is a certain liberation in knowing that you can have a party and someone else is cleaning up the mess.

SPOTLIGHT: How do you feel about turning over the reins to Jeph Loeb and Joe Madureira in particular?

MARK: In all honesty? We couldn't be happier. Jeph is a brilliant writer and is probably the most commercial comic-book producer (because that's what he is) in the business. He can package pure gold and my only regret is that the swine will probably double the sales on what's pretty much the biggest hit we've ever had. And you know what? It won't even have him breathing heavy. He and Joe have a very different different style from us and that's a relief. I'd have hated to see someone just aping what we've done.

SPOTLIGHT: You've gotten a lot of mileage out of teasing whether Thor was the real deal or merely insane, and it seems now we've gotten an answer, to a degree. But is he still a character that works best with a bit of mystery to him? Should we never get too familiar with his background?

MARK: It's important to keep a little mystery when the character has been plucked from myth like this, but the gag has run its course. If we didn't give a definite answer as to where Thor came from after 5 years and twenty-six issues, I think people would be coming after us with screw-drivers. I've seen *X-Files* season five. I know how it feels to be left unsatisfied.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of which, what's up with his powers? Truly technology-based or...?

MARK: Read the comic...

SPOTLIGHT: Some of America's strategic adversaries responded with a Superhuman Defense Initiative of their own, in a story ironically entitled "Axis of Evil." But as with Nick Fury, we are able to see their point of view as well. The *Ultimates* have been increasingly aggressive overseas, so it's only natural they'd feel threatened. When you wrote this story, did you intentionally include that degree of ambiguity so we wouldn't be quite sure who to root for?

MARK: Definitely. I'm a liberal, very proud to be a liberal and have a well-known liberal rep in the business. But, to stretch myself, I purposely wrote this book for soldiers as well as peace-campaigners. It really doesn't take sides. Cap, Thor, Iron Man and so on all have very unique voices. Hawkeye is an outright neo-con, but still very likable and sympathetic. I think one of the reasons the book appeals to almost everyone is that I'm just holding a camera up and letting the characters speak for themselves. Liberals are always telling me it's their favourite book and really pushing the envelope, but—at the same book-signing—I can have a GI come up to me with a tattoo of Ultimate Cap, and a friend of mine from my message-board even has a photo of him reading the first collection on Saddam Hussein's bed. I find that quite interesting and, as a writer, makes me feel like I've done my job properly.

SPOTLIGHT: Is this volume a commentary on real-world events to a degree?

MARK: I don't set out to use allegories. Ideas just come from our experiences and I'm more interested in reading current affairs than fantasy novels so my stories are always going to be steeped a little more in CNN than JRR Tolkien. We're the sum of everything we absorb through our eyeballs and hopefully the fact that I'm very interested in the real world helps give my stuff a slightly different flavour from most people.

SPOTLIGHT: What does the future hold for you in the Ultimate Universe?

MARK: Really, not too much. I launched *Ultimate X-Men*, the *Ultimates* and helped launch *Ultimate Fantastic Four* so there's really very little left to say there. That said, I have a real hankering--a love affair going back to when I was seven--for *Blade* and *Ghost Rider*. Maybe I'll pitch a series for each of them later today. I love working with Ralph, John and Nicole so it would be great to do something. Actually, you've inspired me. I'll talk to them about this today.

ULTIMATE FANTASTIC FOUR

SPOTLIGHT: Before we move off your interactions with the Ultimate Universe, a few questions about *Ultimate Fantastic Four*, please. One of the themes that seems to reoccur in the series is the question of whether the FF are super heroes or scientists. Which do you see them as?

MARK: Without question, they're super heroes. I always feel people who describe them as scientists or explorers are just ashamed to be reading super hero comics. Sir Rannulph Fiennes is an explorer. Stephen Hawking is a scientist. Reed Richards wears a blue costume, has a codename and fights a man called Dr. Doom. He's

super hero, but he's also a scientist in the same way that Spider-Man is a super hero who is a high school teacher and a photographer.

SPOTLIGHT: Had you conceived the idea of Reed literally "stretching" his brain when you first started the series, or was that a notion you came up with upon your return?

MARK: Stan Lee gave me the greatest piece of advice just before I started writing this series. He said the book was called the **FANTASTIC** Four as opposed to the **REALISTIC** Four and no idea was too crazy for this book. The fun is just making this stuff up as you go along.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you come up with the idea to do a crossover with the zombieified version of the Marvel Universe? And was there ever any serious consideration given to doing a crossover with the regular MU, or was that just a tease?

MARK: The crossover thing is a little dance we all do at the Marvel summits. Some of the guys love the idea of crossing over the two lines and others hate it. I thought it would be fun to tease as it's the ultimate taboo for a lot of people. But personally, I don't see the point. It would sell like crazy, but I like how simple the Ultimate universe is. As for how I came up with the zombies, the idea came to me after the brilliant Danny Boyle movie *28 Days Later*. Their big idea was zombies moving quickly instead of lumbering and I started to think how scary it would be if they could stretch under doors, punch through walls and so on. I wrote the idea up on a plane-trip to a Marvel meeting and after about ten minutes of total mockery, people started to see where I was coming from and really got into the idea. The spin-off book, *Marvel Zombies*, is fantastic, by the way. If you haven't read it yet pick up the collection.

SPOTLIGHT: Any hints as to what the future holds for the Zombie FF?

MARK: They were always restrained so we could have that horrible moment when they escape. It's quite good.

SPOTLIGHT: Namor is a good deal more villainous in his Ultimate incarnation. Do you see any chance of him coming over to the other side as his counterpart did, or is Ultimate Namor a bad guy through and through?

MARK: No, I think it's best to keep him out there as that unpredictable

anti-hero. The Bill Everett version was, as far as I know, the first angry young man in American pop culture. He predated James Dean by about fifteen years, I think, and I liked the danger he seemed to have then. He's become a little too cozy in the Marvel Universe and we don't really feel any sense of threat or menace. This is something I want to address in *Marvel Civil War* a little because he's a great character.

SPOTLIGHT: The FF recently undertook a time travel mission to undo the accident that gave them their powers, and it's had some unexpected side effects, namely a complete alteration of world history. Do you plan on this arc having lasting effects on the book going forward?

MARK: No, that story is completely self-contained and folds in upon itself three times by the ending. There's no loose ends to play with, though I think a world filled with super heroes would make a nice spin-off book. Imagine every person, every pet and every insect had powers. Like *Marvel Zombies*, I came up with *Super-Earth* as something with the potential to spin-off as a new series. The FF is great fun, it really is. I'll miss it as much as I missed *Ultimates* and would love a crack at the regular book one day with Bryan Hitch or Frank Quitely or maybe even a guy like Ryan Sook (who I'm a big fan of). I've got a million ideas for a book like that. I could write it for five years or, at least, until everyone gets bored.

MARK ON CIVIL WAR

SPOTLIGHT: We've heard a lot of fans hypothesize about what *Civil War* is about, as well as initial statements from Marvel's publicity folks. But you're the guy who's plotting the storyline, writing the dialogue, and setting up the action! Can you sum up in a few words what Marvel's *Civil War* means to you, as far as the overall theme?

MARK: *Civil War* is about what happens when the Marvel heroes are forced to grow up. It's as simple as that. The public need and want the heroes. They couldn't survive without them in a world filled with super-villains and alien invasions. However, the wild west fantasy these guys have been having, where they put on a mask and fight whoever they like just doesn't cut it in the modern world. Real people are getting hurt here and, for the first time, the heroes are being asked to come over onto the side of law and order in an official capacity so these guys can be properly regulated. Some are happy about this and others feel it's compromising everything they stand for.



SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES: Mark's Ultimate FF are introduced to the Male Man's Subteranneans! (From *Ultimate Fantastic Four* #6.)



MUTANT MISTRUST: Even when the X-Men are helping save lives in the wake of the Stamford tragedy, the Sentinels are watching! (From *Civil War*)

MARK: No, this is absolutely unique for me. I've been doing this for a while and tend to know my way around a plot. If you're doing a second draft of an issue of *Ultimates*, for example, it's very unusual and a third draft is absolutely unheard of. So you can imagine my surprise when the first two issues of *Civil War* went through something like six or eight drafts and the tweaks just kept coming. Often, when people say "draft" they mean a couple of pages, but I mean a fundamental rewrite every time with entire sequences and plots and main characters completely switched around. We introduced, for example, a group called HAMMER that replaces SHIELD to carry out the registration agenda and two issues were written with these guys before we all agreed to scrap it. It's a huge task and I'm not moaning because a book this big needs to be done right and needs to be done with the absolute approval of all the other people at the company. I'm borrowing other people's characters here and they obviously need to be happy with the condition they get their toys back in. It's been very collaborative in that sense and I've really listened hard to lots of people on this project. It's much less autonomous than I'm used to.

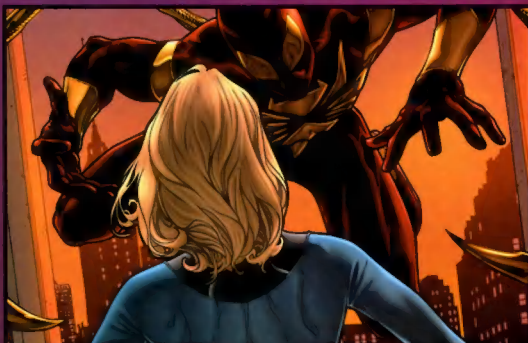
SPOTLIGHT: Captain America and Iron Man, two "brothers" who have served together since the earliest years of the Avengers (they even shared the *Tales of Suspense* title in the 60s), are the personalities that take the lead in Marvel's *Civil War*. The question "Whose Side Are You On?" directly relates to the stands made by these two Marvel heroes. Can you explore for us why it was those two characters that you chose to be the linchpin of *Civil War*?

MARK: It just kind of evolved naturally. I can't remember where it started, but the actual sides people were taking was discussed at length with the core writers and all the editors at one of our big summits. Cap is a natural, of course, because he's all about freedom and civil liberties and Iron Man just seemed like the only guy with the weight and the authority to disagree with him. Had this been a great ideological debate between Captain America and Tigra, for example, I don't think the readers and the country would have been as torn.

SPOTLIGHT: Which characters have surprised you that have stepped to the fore in the series; perhaps you didn't think you'd enjoy writing them, or they'd have little to contribute, but through the process have taken a larger role?

MARK: Here's the ultimate cop-out answer, but I've really enjoyed writing them all. It's been hard work, but one of the nice things about doing a huge crossover like this is that you can cherry-pick from literally dozens of brilliant, classic characters for your next scene. It's an absolute joy in that sense because it's impossible to get bored. Every time I write Reed and Sue I'm reminded how much I like them, but Cap and Tony have probably been the most fun. The trick is to treat them all with respect. That's why I'm not going for the cheap deaths and keeping body count to a minimum. The most stupid character you can think of with the worst creative team and lamest origin and smallest number of appearances is somebody's favorite character. Somebody dressed up as that guy for Halloween, you know what I'm saying? So you have to keep that in mind at all times.

Thanks for taking time to answer our questions, Mark! And for fans of his Mark and his work, make sure to check out how he winds up *Ultimate Fantastic Four* and *Ultimates 2*, and also buzz by Millarworld and see what's happening with his creator-owned books! As for *Civil War*, well, we expect you'll be hearing quite a lot about this epic as the months roll on! This is only the first shot!



IS THAT YOU, SPIDER-MAN?™ Sue Richards welcomes the newly-costumed Spider-Man to the meeting of the superheroes in *Civil War* #1.

SPOTLIGHT COMMENTARY ON CIVIL WAR #1

Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada and Executive Editor Tom Brevoort joined Marvel Spotlight for a trip through the first issue of Civil War, leading to a fruitful discussion about the flashpoint for the battle between the superheroes and where it's all heading! But, as with all things Civil War, the first topic of discussion is Speedball!

CIVIL WAR #1, PAGE 4:

SPOTLIGHT: CIVIL WAR starts off innocuously enough, with Speedball taking on Speedfreak in a fight that...Hey, wait a second! Whose idea was it to pit Speedball against Speedfreak? You guys are pulling out all the funky named superheroes!

TOM: Mark is constantly asking for particularly-shaped puzzle pieces to fill in holes in his story. He'll e-mail with requests like, "I need a tech guy who can be part of Cap's crew and can do this." And then I scour the Marvel U and come up with candidates who can fill that hole. So when Mark was writing this scene, he called for four established villains to use. I pulled together a list of possible candidates who weren't in play elsewhere, and he cherry-picked from that. So I put Speedfreak on the list, and Mark selected him.

JOE: And in many ways, that's going to be one of the fun aspects of Civil War because as we dug through the old toy box we came across a few characters that got us thinking. So, you never know who may show up in Civil War and you never know who may actually hang around and get a new lease on Marvel life.

SPOTLIGHT: Good for Mark to go for "the funny" by selecting Speedfreak to rumble with Speedball, but when you think about it, maybe that wasn't just a gratuitous nod to ironic, inside humor. When you isolate these first few pages from what follows, Civil War starts off as a fun New Warriors romp, quite opposite in tone from what will happen a little later. Do you think Mark's primary goal in these first few pages was to get folks laughing?

TOM: I don't specifically think he was going for laughs so much as the kind of typical high-spirited adventure that makes up the style most often associated with super hero comics—before pulling the rug out by introducing real-world consequences into the action.

The house that the villains are staying in, by the way, is that of assistant editor Molly Lazer's family.

SPOTLIGHT: Gotta love Speedball's really poor attempt at Spidey-style wisecrack.

TOM: Sure—like Spidey, Speedball is a Steve Ditko character, and cut from the same cloth—though maybe not as fine a weave.



SPOTLIGHT: I totally loved Speedball when I was a kid. As a huge fan of Steve Ditko, it was a book I eagerly awaited each month. But those were more innocent times, natch, and I had NO idea what a Speedball was in drug parlance. Joe Quesada has mentioned many times, usually in a joking manner, that he'd love to off Speedball just to get rid of the character with the suggestive name. Over time, have there indeed been internal discussions about what to do with this character?

TOM: We talk about all of the characters all of the time, to one degree or another. In the case of Speedball, his name came up during the first discussions at the Creator Summit about Civil War. The idea—and I'm not sure who said it, possibly Jeph Loeb—was that it'd be the most innocuous guy in the super hero community who'd ignite the fuse on Civil War. The last guy you'd expect. In the very first draft, this opening scene was very different, and Speedball was the only super hero on site.

JOE: Speedball? Isn't he dead?



CIVIL WAR #1, PAGE 6:

TOM: The first panel was silent right up until the very last second, as people who read the preview of the first few pages in Wizard may have seen. But this “beat” just didn’t work without some text in the frame.

SPOTLIGHT: You say that the page dialogue didn’t work out the way it was originally intended. As editor, how tough a job is it to coordinate rewrites like this? Do you sometimes worry that even small changes like this might result in a domino effect that creates even more work down the line?

TOM: In a case like this, not tough at all. But Mark did do eight discrete drafts of Civil War #1 by the time we got to the end, and even after that some tweaking of copy at the lettering stage.

There are places where changing a line can have a domino effect on what comes later. But this was a minor tweak, making sure the “moment” of panel one communicated what it was supposed to. With the panel being silent, people would stop in their reading and try to figure out what they were supposed to be seeing beyond what was there. With that one balloon in place, you read past this

panel on the surface, not seeking a hidden meaning that isn’t present.

SPOTLIGHT: This is really a magnificent page from Steve McNiven. You can see Namorita’s skyward thrust reflected in the lens on Micabe, and you can feel the tug back down to Earth pulling through her center of gravity in panel two. (She has a nice center of gravity, too!) But what struck me next is the key positioning of the school bus: makes you want to stand up and shout, “STOP!” Super hero rule #1: don’t take your battles to a school!

JOE: It’s tragic, isn’t it? It makes you realize that heroes and villains get caught up in the moment sometimes and mistakes can happen. What’s interesting to me is how you very rarely really see the collateral damage in comics. That’s part of what makes Civil War special, it’s because of the collateral damage that the Marvel U finds itself where it is now. Steve’s art illustrates this point beautifully on that page, by the way. See how Namorita and Nitro are tiny on the page in the last panel? The focus is on the bus and the kids playing. By shifting focus to the right, Steve & Mark show us the people in the most danger, and how Namorita and Nitro are completely unaware of them.

FANS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Dear Marvel,

I haven't written many letters to Marvel (in fact, my last one was to John Byrne's SENSATIONAL SHE-HULK series), but I wanted to take a moment and thank you folks for the great gem you have in MARVEL SPOTLIGHT. While your HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE series is awesome, something like SPOTLIGHT is an essential piece of reading for every Marvelite, introducing the readers to the individuals who make the comics and characters we know and love come to life.

I was especially interested to read the Joss Whedon interview. The interviews are engaging, often funny, and I'm pleased to see that the creators are as much into comics as the fans are. I was inspired to read RUNAWAYS because of Joss's recommendation. The unedited script was killer, too.

So I have but one suggestion: as the opening day for Spider-Man 3 approaches (hey, next summer will be here before we know it), SPOTLIGHT should give us a double whammy: Stan Lee and John Romita Sr. I'd love to see these two giants banter about what made the Webspinner great for them, and I'd especially like to see the interviews delve into topics the many other ones never have. One thing I'd like to know is what Stan and John's favorite Spidey comics were after they left the series.

Anyway, my hat's off to you. SPOTLIGHT's on my perpetual pull list, and I can't wait to see what's coming next month

Alex Lear

Damariscotta, Maine

Hey, Alex! Thanks for the praise, but I gotta ask: Stan Lee? John Romita, Sr.? Are you serious? I mean, what did Stan do but help create the whole blamed Marvel Universe? What did John Romita, Sr. do but birth the iconic look of Mary Jane Watson (as well as a precious little tyke named John, Jr.)? What did the two of them do in tandem but turn out some of the greatest Spider-Man comics of all time? Who would want to talk to those two? It's a serious question I'm asking here!

Well...now that I think about it, Marvel Spotlight would! You know, that's the best idea I've had all day long! Stan Lee! John Romita, Sr.! It all makes so much sense. I'm a genius!!!

Can't promise when, Alex, but I think I'm going to share my genius idea with the powers that be and see what happens. Thank you for your support!

Keep those letters and emails coming in! Please send emails to trades@marvel.com!

NEXT ISSUE:

NEIL GAIMAN

MARVEL VALUE STAMP 18



MARVEL VALUE STAMP 19



SALVADOR LARROCA